

THE ADMINISTRATION

Request for Repeal

Me and [Stokely] Carmichael can't fill all them camps. They must be planning on taking somebody else.

—H. Rap Brown

For nearly two decades, the President has in fact had at his disposal an ugly antidote to dissent—detention camps. The Internal Security Act of 1950 enables the President to declare an “internal security emergency” and authorize the Attorney General to round up and detain persons believed to be engaged in acts of espionage or sabotage. In 1952, reacting to enormous pressure from the right, Attorney General J. Howard McGrath ordered six detention camps made ready. The camps have never been used as envisioned under the act,* but their very authorization has created among blacks and militant radicals in recent months a paranoia that they might be.

The fear had a number of origins. In May 1968 House Un-American Activities Committee concluded that camps might be used for black militants who espouse “guerrilla warfare.” It spread to the antiwar dissenters and campus radicals last spring when Deputy Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst was quoted in the *Atlantic* magazine as saying: “If people demonstrated in a manner to interfere with others, they should be rounded up and put in a detention camp.” Then Vice President Spiro Agnew remarked that “the rotten apples” should be separated from our society.

Something of a Surprise. Last week the Nixon Administration moved to allay these fears and called for repeal of Title II of the Security Act, which provides for the camps. Kleindienst, who has emphatically denied the *Atlantic* quote, was chosen to announce the Administration's proposal. The decision was reached, he said, in hope that it “will allay the fears and suspicions—unfounded as they may be—of many of our citizens.”

There has been considerable sympathy on Capitol Hill for doing away with Title II. Hawaii Democratic Senator Daniel K. Inouye, mindful that many Japanese-Americans were shunted off to camps during World War II, has led the attack. Until last week, however, Inouye's cause seemed hopeless. “I was under the impression that Justice was against repeal,” he says. Others who directly suggested a repeal of the camp provision to Attorney General John Mitchell in recent weeks came away with the same impression. So the Nixon request was something of a surprise, but one likely to meet with the approval of both houses of Congress.

* They were originally located in Avon Park, Fla., El Reno, Okla., Allenwood, Pa., Florence and Wickenburg, Ariz., and Tulalake, Calif. Three have been sold. Florence and Allenwood are still maintained by the U.S. Bureau of Prisons for short-term convicts. And El Reno is used for cattle grazing.